



# Meeting Notes

**Meeting Date:** November 30, 2022

**Notes Prepared By:** Phil Goff, Project Manager

**Place:** Virtual Meeting

**Date:** 12/1/2022

**Project No.:** WIN: 24759.00 / VHB: 55647.00

**Project Name:** MaineDOT RUAC Supporting Study – Lower Road Rail Corridor

## RUAC Meeting Attendees (bold indicates attendance):

MaineDOT Team	RUAC	Guests
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Nate Howard</b>, (MaineDOT, PM)</li> <li>• <b>Nate Moulton</b>, (MaineDOT Dir. of Freight and Passenger Services)</li> <li>• <b>Meghan Russo</b>, MaineDOT</li> <li>• <b>Dakota Hewlett</b>, MaineDOT Active Transportation Program Manager</li> <li>• <b>Tony Grande</b> (VHB)</li> <li>• <b>Phil Goff</b> (VHB)</li> <li>• <b>Tim Bryant</b> (VHB)</li> <li>• <b>Mike McDonough</b> (VHB)</li> <li>• Eric Halvorsen (RKG)</li> <li>• Larry Cranor (RKG)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Chair Mathew Eddy</b> (Executive Director, Midcoast Council of Governments)</li> <li>• <b>Doug Beck</b>, ME Bureau of Parks and Lands</li> <li>• <b>Nicole Briand</b>, Town Manager, Bowdoinham</li> <li>• <b>Tony Cameron</b>, CEO, Maine Tourism Assoc.</li> <li>• <b>Jeremy Cluchey</b>, Chair of Merrymeeting Board of Supervisors (Bowdoinham)</li> <li>• <b>Doug Ebert</b>, Chair of SB, Town of Farmingdale</li> <li>• <b>Tom Ferrell</b>, Dir of Parks and Recs, Town of Brunswick</li> <li>• <b>Gay Grant</b>, City of Gardiner and chair of Trail Committee</li> <li>• <b>Gary Lamb</b>, Hallowell City Manager</li> <li>• <b>Keith Luke</b>, EcDev Director, City of Augusta</li> <li>• <b>Matt Nixon</b>, Select Board, Town of Topsham</li> <li>• <b>Carolann Ouellette</b>, Director, Maine Office of Outdoor Recreation</li> <li>• <b>Richard Rudolph Ph.D</b>, Chair, ME Rail Users Network and on board of MRTC</li> <li>• <b>Larissa Loon</b>, Richmond</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>

## Agenda:

- > Introductions
- > Background and Purpose of the Council
  - o LD 1133



## Meeting Notes

- Rail Preservation Act
- Corridor Study Area
- Corridor Use Option for Consideration
- › Summary of VHB Team's Scope of Work
- › Round Robin Discussion
- › Agenda for Future RUAC Meetings
  - Schedule for forthcoming monthly meetings
  - Public meeting (spring?)
  - Future Agenda Items including guest presentations
  - Other?
- › Public Comment

### Meeting Summary and Council Discussion:

After the presentations were made by Nate Howard and Phil Goff, Council members were given the opportunity to ask questions and make comments:

- › Richard R: I have a Point of Order – as you know, there is a transit propensity study so it seems like Bangor and Waterville should have some representation on the Council (esp given the \$\$ spent).
  - Matt E – yes, let's put that on the agenda for the next meeting (Nate: I agree)
- › Richard R: will everything be on the web site (agenda, mtg minutes, etc.)?
  - Nate: yes
- › Gay: Scope for Lower Road includes to the east of the rail bridge in Augusta...why is it not included?
  - Nate M: the scope includes the bridge and the east end is the endpoint of state ownership of the corridor. We don't own the land on the other/east side so we'll need to work something out.
  - Nate H: CSX owns the line to the east and they are not supportive of trails in general
- › Gay: how does this fit into the current Rail Plan? Can that be provided as background material?
  - Nate H: that will be available in Jan 2023. Ideally, this process should speak to this corridor, so the analysis in the rail plan should be secondary. The Portland to Bangor study should help too.
  - Gay: it would be good to look at the analysis however, especially costs and timing
- › Gary: are railroad companies OK with having trails adjacent to active lines?
  - Nate H: the state is OK with that but not CSX
- › Matt N: when we talk about the options, the rail with trail...does it need to be consistent from end to end?
  - Nate H: it doesn't need to be...it is up to the Council if you want to mix and match.



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- › Matt E: is there a way to eliminate the tracks in this process based on the Rail Preservation Act?
  - Nate M: any removal of tracks is interim in nature and the corridor must be maintained to bring rail back in the future...i.e., maintain crossings etc. as if the corridor still has rail. Ditto if we replace a bridge or culvert (it will need to accommodate rail service). We were challenged by abutters on the Sunrise Trail and the state won both lawsuits. On the Eastern Trail, the corridor is turned over to local municipalities and/or maintenance organizations, but for Lower Road and others, MaineDOT will retain ownership since it won't be a permanent trail
  - Richard: is the slideshow available for public review? (Nate H: both slide presentations will be posted in the next few days with mtg minutes and agenda, etc.) There is a great Op-Ed column in this week's Central Maine Journal called "The Great Train Robbery is under way" that I encourage people to read.

### Round Robin Discussion

- › Tom (Brunswick): our Town Council is supportive and we have a few active initiatives in Brunswick. We are working with Bath and W Bath to look at extension of trail from Cooks Corner further to Saginaw Bridge (10 mi section). We plan to meet w Dakota and others at DOT soon. We are a hub of trails and our current path is very well used and popular. We are at the end of this corridor but can be a hub for a larger network
- › Keith (Augusta): City has complex relationship along the corridor. Kennebec River Bridge and 'truck strikes' on Water St overpass 3-4 times/year. People wonder why the low-clearance bridge continues to remain. It demarcates the line between a blighted structure and the great revitalization we've done elsewhere downtown. We want more use on the Lower Road corridor in SOME way would be good...either rail or trail. The status quo doesn't work for us. The RWT layout hasn't worked well given the active rail nearby...it isn't well used because of the trains going by.
- › Gary (Hallowell): I agree with the comments about the blighted bridges. People here talk about putting the trail off the road and onto the rail line. Bathrooms are needed too
- › Gay (Gardiner): it is a stranded asset. Great possibilities to connect to Merrymeeting (MM) Trail and ECG. We want to do something positive with the corridor...if the econ and other analysis points to rail, then 'great'...if not, then rail is great too. We may not have the population to create econ benefits. We need to draw more people to our region and active transportation and lifestyle is important. We need the Ec Dev analysis to show us if that is the case. Officially, the Town of Gardiner doesn't favor one option or the other...we want to see the numbers first.
- › Larissa (Richmond): the Board is excited for a trail to connect to Gardiner and Bowdoinham. Personally, I want to see both rail and trail so I prefer a RWT configuration ideally.
- › Nicole (Bowdoinham): lots of opportunity with the state's asset and sitting unused is a shame. Some maintenance is needed in culverts ect. along the corridor. We should take advantage of the asset ideally.



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- › Matt N (Topsham): speaking as a Select Board member, we unanimously support the Lower Rd as a multi-use trail including snowmobiles and ATV, which bring Econ Dev to the region. Speaking personally, as a Millennial, we are particularly impacted by climate change. The biggest contributor is vehicle exhaust and transportation. Therefore, we need to remove cars from the road and support reliable commuter rail service. I personally support RWT configuration to ensure better access for rail service. Riding a bike from Topsham to Augusta is not possible so RWT is the way to go.
- › Jeremy (MM Trail rep): from Bowdoinham, I would ride a bike to Augusta. The effort to pursue a trail goes back 15 years. Formal resolutions from the 4 towns started the whole effort. There is long standing community support. This is the perfect time to move forward with this planning, esp given the current "family of plans" effort. Note about tone: this shouldn't be a rail vs trail battle, as many trail folks like me support trains too. Regarding maintenance; our MM Trail Board of Supervisors can help facilitate maintenance in the future.
- › Richard (ME Rail Users Network): LD 227 was originally a Feasibility Study to study Lower Rd from Brunswick to Bangor but it was cut back to Augusta only. The portion all the way up to Bangor is only a "propensity study". I agree with the climate issue and I live in Portland and I don't want to drive to Waterville or Augusta. We need to get more cars off the road with rail service.
- › Doug (Farmingdale): no comments at the time
- › Tony (Tourism Assoc.): I live in Brunswick. From a tourism perspective, we want to learn about econ impact of tourism for both visitors and residents. Transportation and housing are major issues for the state and we need to ease those burdens.
- › Carolann (Office of Outdoor Rec): investments in quality of life assets is critical and there is an emphasis on outdoor recreation helps to improve quality of life. One piece of our 10 year plan is to support infrastructure so helping move people around is important too.
- › Doug Beck (Parks and Lands): mirroring Carolann's remarks...I want to say as manager of Rec Trails program, I am here as a resource for the Council and others. We manage many trails currently. Prior to Bureau of Lands, I was with Maine CDC and we promoted active lifestyle for public health reasons.
- › Matt E (Midcoast COG): when Kennebec River rose in 1988, it took out much of the rail. What is the present maintenance of the corridor today?
  - Nate H: we only have 3 FT staff for the entire state with High-Rail trucks. They accommodate washouts, beaver issues, etc.

### Forthcoming Meetings

- › Nate H: do we want monthly meetings, what re-occurring times works? Last Wednesday of month (skipping December). Consensus is yes...let's meet again in late January via Zoom.
- › Matt: getting materials ahead of time will be helpful



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- › Gary: will 8 meetings be enough? (Matt E: I hope so.)
  - Nate H: we could do 2X per month later if we need to.
  - Matt E: for recommendations later, we may want to meet in person
- › Matt E: guest presentations are a good idea. Please think of people who could do that.

### Public comments

- › Patricia Barber: Re: Gay's question about the rail plan. In the early rail plan, it recommended Mtn Div continue as a rail corridor, but the Council went against the rec. and went with trail, which I disagree with.
- › John LaMarca (registered guide in Bowdoinham): I am a property owner in Bowdoinham...what is the plan for abutter relations if the trail impact conversation land (which is inevitable)? What about wildlife crossings if rail service or trail is included with a security fence? (Phil: we will keep this in mind)
- › Mark Battle (Brunswick resident): I am advocating for establishment of a multi-use trail. We were sad to see a rail line go where I grew up in Ohio. However, the path is now a great econ engine for the community (78 miles long and part of a 3000 mile x-country trail). I'm not against rail but want to see a trail.
- › Ryan Gordon (Hallowell): I live near the corridor and support the trail until rail option. I work in Augusta and my family has one car and we commute by bike year-round when we can. A rail trail is a necessary element for us and we moved here because of the trail. The ½ mile gap is a major barrier, esp for children. Comp Plan focuses on completing the trail. Trail will come back much quicker than rail service. To me, trail will decrease more cars than rail service, which won't be effective in this area.
- › Jenn Curtis (Dir. of Planning and Dev in Bowdoinham): I support the trail for both econ and recreation benefits. The Town already has invested in trails and parks. Comp Plan supports rail trail.
- › Kristine Keeney (East Coast Greenway Alliance): the MM Trail is a critical future link on the ECG. My understanding is that no train has run on the corridor for the past 40 years. Continuing the *status quo* is not sustainable for the corridor. I love trains but we need to consider what is truly feasible. Rail ridership on Amtrak is good from NH to Portland but the numbers really drop from Portland to Brunswick. If few people use the service between those two cities, then it doesn't bode well for an even more rural area. If part of the line is covered by a parking lot in Augusta, then we shouldn't be too worried about conversion to trail.
  - Keith: clarifying the last point: the City of Augusta has agreement with MaineDOT to restore rail bed within 30 days if rail service is ever restored along the corridor.
- › Ben Whatley: I have a vegetable farm with a road crossing near Tide Park in Topsham, which is positive way to get people to access our farm stand. Some group bike rides from MM Trail have come on "Open Farm" day too. We have some staff who commute by bike from Brunswick. A trail would be very positive for us.
- › Wendy Rose (Community Dev Committee chair in Bowdoinham): it is hard for us to develop economically. A rail trail would come right thru our town and we think this will really help us, more so than rail service.
- › Nate H: we can potentially bring folks on a high-rail tour in the spring.
- › Meeting informally adjourned at 12:11